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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 130403320-4891-02]

RTID 0648-XS028

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic;

Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic; 2020-2021

Recreational Fishing Season for Black Sea Bass

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; recreational season length.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the length of the recreational fishing season for black sea bass in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic will extend throughout the species' 2020-2021 fishing year. Announcing the length of recreational season for black sea bass is one of the accountability measures (AMs) for the recreational sector. This announcement allows recreational fishers to maximize their opportunity to harvest the recreational annual catch limit (ACL) for black sea bass during the fishing season while managing harvest to protect the black sea bass resource.

DATES: This rule is effective from 12:01 a.m. eastern time on April 1, 2020, through March 31, 2021, unless changed by

subsequent notification in the **Federal Register**.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nikhil Mehta, NMFS Southeast Regional Office, telephone: 727-824-5305, email: *nikhil.mehta@noaa.gov*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery includes black sea bass south of 35°15.9' N latitude and is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council prepared the FMP and the FMP is implemented by NMFS under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622.

The recreational fishing year for black sea bass is April 1 through March 31. The recreational AM for black sea bass requires that before the April 1 start date of each recreational fishing year, NMFS projects the length of the recreational fishing season based on when NMFS projects the recreational ACL will be met, and announces the recreational season end date in the **Federal Register** (50 CFR 622.193(e)(2)). The purpose of this AM is to have a more predictable recreational season length while still constraining harvest at or below the recreational ACL to protect the stock from experiencing adverse biological consequences.

The recreational ACL for the 2020-2021 black sea bass

fishing year is 323,161 lb (146,583 kg) gutted weight, or 381,330 lb (172,968 kg) round weight. The recreational ACL was set through the final rule for Abbreviated Framework Amendment 2 to the FMP (84 FR 14021, April 9, 2019).

NMFS estimates that recreational landings for the 2020-2021 fishing year will be less than the 2020-2021 recreational ACL. To make this determination, NMFS compared recreational landings in the last 3 fishing years to the recreational ACL for the 2020-2021 black sea bass fishing year. Recreational landings in each of the past 3 fishing years have been substantially less than the 2020-2021 recreational ACL; therefore, recreational landings are projected to be less than the 2020-2021 recreational ACL. Accordingly, the recreational sector for black sea bass is not expected to close during the fishing year as a result of reaching its ACL, and the season end date for recreational fishing for black sea bass in the South Atlantic EEZ south of 35°15.9' N latitude is March 31, 2021.

Classification

The Regional Administrator for the NMFS Southeast Region has determined this temporary rule is necessary for the conservation and management of South Atlantic black sea bass and is consistent with the FMP, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable laws.

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.193(e) (2) and is

exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

These measures are exempt from the procedures of the Regulatory Flexibility Act because the temporary rule is issued without opportunity for prior notice and comment.

This action responds to the best scientific information available. The Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries (AA) finds that the need to immediately implement the notice of the recreational season length constitutes good cause to waive the requirements to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth in 5 U.S.C. 553(b) (B), because prior notice and opportunity for public comment on this temporary rule is unnecessary. Such procedures are unnecessary, because the rule establishing the AM has already been subject to notice and comment and all that remains is to notify the public of the recreational season length.

For the aforementioned reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effectiveness of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d) (3).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 16, 2020.

Karyl K. Brewster-Geisz,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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